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ABSTRACT

Many treatments of teacher questioning in reading and literature have defined teacher questioning as a cognitive process. Emanating from a reading comprehension perspective, this view of questioning argues that asking a variety of higher level questions will lead students from literal to more inferential levels of text understanding. Approaches to literature teaching based solely on taxonomies or reading levels, however, may not be entirely appropriate for explaining what happens when readers understand and interpret literary, as opposed to non-literary texts. From a sociolinguistic perspective, teachers' questions have also been envisioned as part of a social interaction, in which learning experiences evolve out of the mutual participation of teachers and students. This perspective can be somewhat limited, however, when it deals only with the surface dimensions of classroom interactions. In order to fully understand the dynamics of their questioning practices, teachers must learn to view them as part of a cultural event, where the very identities of each participant as student, teacher, learner, or interpreter are shaped and defined. In understanding the cognitive, social, and cultural dimensions of the questions they ask, teachers can not only begin to ask more challenging questions of their students, but also begin to challenge the underlying assumptions behind the questions they ask, as well as the very predominance of questioning as an instructional technique. (Fifty-four references are attached.) (PRA)

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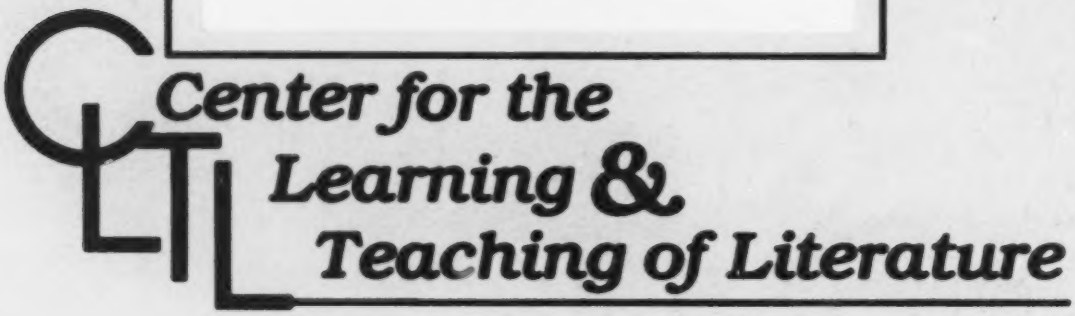
Susan Hynds



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Challenging Questions in the Literature Classroom

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Challenging Questions in the Literature Classroom

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Teacher: Okay. Do you have any questions on number three that says "a romance contains mysterious, magical, and supernatural events?" Does anyone have any questions about that?

Student: What do you mean by supernatural events?

Teacher: Let me just give you an example. There's one knight that we are going to read about in the section of tales that we have whose power wanes at twelve o'clock noon, which means that if you are a knight that wants to try to defeat him, at what time would you want to fight him?

Student: 12:00 P.M.

Teacher: Right. Twelve o'clock. Yes, because his powers would not be as strong. That's what I mean by supernatural events.

The high school students in the preceding excerpt are talking about The Tales of King Arthur. If we take this small sample of talk as somehow representative of this teacher's approach to classroom questioning, we can make several different types of observations.

We might begin by looking at the **cognitive dimensions** of this teacher's questions. We could ask, for instance, what proportion of her questions are "higher level," and what proportion are "lower level," according to some taxonomy of thinking skills. We might look at whether this teacher's questions are focused on literal or implied ideas, content or form, and so on. We might then try to determine how the types of questions this teacher asks over a period of several classroom interactions relate to her students' overall understanding or achievement.

Beyond the cognitive dimensions, we might analyze this brief interchange as a **social interaction**. We could study the turn-taking episodes between teacher and students, noting how often the conversation shifts from teacher to student or from student to student. We might also study how the teacher, by evaluating (or failing to evaluate) students' responses positively or negatively, evokes the "acceptable" or "preferred" response.

Finally, we might look beneath and beyond the content and structure of this questioning episode, posing our own questions about the **cultural dimensions** of this teacher's classroom, as evidenced by the instructional choices she makes, the questions she poses, and the responses she rewards.

In this paper, I will argue that many treatments of teacher questioning in reading and literature have defined teacher questioning as a **cognitive process** (see Gall, 1970 and Gall, 1984 for reviews). Emanating from a "reading comprehension" perspective, this view of questioning argues that asking a variety of "higher level" questions will lead students from "literal" to more

"inferential" levels of text understanding. However, approaches to literature teaching based solely on taxonomies or reading levels may not be entirely appropriate for explaining what happens when readers understand and interpret literary, as opposed to non-literary texts.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, teachers' questions have also been envisioned as part of a **social interaction**, in which learning experiences evolve out of the mutual participation of teachers and students. From this viewpoint, for instance, teachers might analyze the proportion of talk belonging to them and to their students, or the degree to which they extend or close off conversation by the use of evaluative statements. However, this perspective can be somewhat limited when it deals only with the surface dimensions of classroom interactions--that is, the ways in which teachers and students use language. For, beneath and beyond what teachers and students say are implicit rules for acceptable behavior within the context of a particular classroom. Thus, in order to fully understand the dynamics of their questioning practices, teachers must learn to view these practices as part of a **cultural event**, where the very identities of each participant as student, teacher, learner, or interpreter are shaped and defined.

In understanding the cognitive, social, and cultural dimensions of the questions they ask, teachers can not only begin to ask more "challenging questions" of their students, they can begin to challenge the underlying assumptions behind the questions they ask, as well as the very predominance of questioning as an instructional technique.

Questioning as a Thinking Process

Julie: [Teachers] usually ask questions that need specific answers and don't require a lot of deep thought, probably because it is easier for them to tell us whether the answer is right or wrong.

Nekia: I think [a teacher's questions] are helpful because if he or she asks a question and you can't answer it someone else can remember both the question and answer and put them in your notes.

Ben: Usually English teachers ask questions that have no meaning and can be answered without any thought.

The Types of Questions Teachers Ask

Beneath the words of Julie, Nekia, and Ben lie powerful messages about how these eighth graders think they are *supposed* to think about literature: as a task of rote memory, requiring little or no divergent thought. For many years, literature teachers have been encouraged to look at their questions in terms of whether they elicit "higher" or "lower" levels of thought, according to a hierarchy of cognitive skills, such as Bloom's (1956) taxonomy. Presumably, higher level questions require students to synthesize, apply, analyze, and/or evaluate information; lower level questions focus on recall of factual information (Pearson & Johnson, 1978).

Hierarchical models of reading are based on the premise that readers can be led through questioning techniques or comprehension guides to think about texts on "literal," "inferential," or

"applied" levels (Herber, 1967). Over the years, a variety of question-based activities have been created for the reading classroom, including: "QAR" (Raphael & Pearson, 1982), "Re-Quest" (Manzo, 1970), and DR-TA (Directed Reading-Thinking Activity) (Stauffer, 1959, 1969). A look at most classroom literary anthologies reveals this hierarchical model of reading in the structure and sequence of the study questions at the end of each selection.

However, Tierney and Cunningham (1984), in their review of instructional practices in reading, reported that "the effect of teacher-questioning behavior upon students is not clear" (p. 620). In the same vein, Dias (in press) has criticized instructional approaches based upon direct applications of such hierarchies by saying that these hierarchically-organized comprehension activities may be appropriate for expository texts, but not for use in the literature classroom. The questions teachers and textbooks pose within these hierarchies tend to produce passive readers and to reduce the act of reading literature "to one of finding answers to questions which are not one's own--even if they are eventually appropriated by the reader" (Dias, in press, p. 16).

Thus, although much literature and reading instruction centers around asking questions about texts, we are not sure if questioning has any more effect than other instructional strategies in getting students to think about what they read. Looking beyond the *types* of questions that teachers pose, we might begin to explore the **questioning practices** of teachers and the influence of these practices on student achievement and understanding.

How Teachers Ask Questions

Perhaps not surprisingly, studies of questioning practices in a variety of content areas have revealed that teachers place a strong emphasis on literal levels of questions, largely to the exclusion of questions which ask students to think. In her review of research on questioning, Gall (1984) reported that even today, "about 60 percent of teachers' questions require students to recall facts; about 20 percent require students to think, and the remaining 20 percent are procedural" (p. 42). She goes on to state that "It appears that teachers emphasize fact questions, whereas research indicates that an emphasis on higher cognitive questions would be more effective" (p. 42).

Current information about the reading classroom is no more encouraging. One study, for instance, demonstrated that approximately 75% of elementary reading teachers' questions about texts were literal, 10% were inferential, and 15% were evaluative (Chou, Hare & Pullinan; 1980). The researchers concluded that:

> Teachers have not significantly changed their questioning habits in the last decade. Even after 12 years time, inferential questions still are found to represent a small percentage of total teacher questions asked. (p. 72)

Most of what we know about teacher questioning practices in the **literature** classroom focuses on the instructional effects of teachers' questions and the congruence between teachers' stated preference for certain types of questions and their actual questioning behaviors. We have discovered, for instance, that teachers ask more questions about the content of a literary work than about form (McGreal, 1976). Furthermore, teachers' questions often direct students to remembering details about the literary work, rather than exploring their own imaginative

responses (Folta, 1981). In many cases, it appears that literature teachers concentrate on meaning-making processes, rather than more "reader-centered" processes such as engagement or personal evaluation.

Finally, there is often little congruence between teachers' stated philosophies and their actual questioning patterns in classroom discussions (Purves, Foshay, & Hansson, 1973; Walker, 1979). Teachers may claim to value creative, interpretive responses, for instance, but concentrate mainly on literal responses in the discussions they actually conduct.

Questioning and Student Achievement

There is evidence in some selected cases, that student achievement is related to the use of higher level questions in class discussions (see Redfield & Rousseau, 1981). From a reading comprehension perspective, for instance, there has been mixed support for the notion that asking questions before, during or after reading relates to students' text comprehension, and/or recall (Anderson & Biddle, 1975; Graves & Clark, 1981; Levin & Pressley, 1981; White, 1981; Willson & Putnam, 1982). However, in general, clear-cut relationships are difficult to draw (see Gall, Ward, Berliner, Caren, Winne, Elashoff, & Stanton, 1978; Mills & Rice, 1979/80). Perhaps the lack of clear-cut distinctions is due to the fact that classroom questions cannot be clearly labeled as "higher" or "lower" level in isolation, but must be studied within the context of other instructional strategies and events.

Not surprisingly, teachers and parents model acceptable ways of reading and responding through the questions they ask (Heil, 1974; Michalak, 1977; Roser and Martinez, 1985). However, it has been shown that students produce more sophisticated responses when their teachers are not present than when class discussions are tightly controlled (Hammond, 1980), and when teachers' questioning styles are "open" rather than "closed" (Hackett, Brown and Michael, 1968).

Similarly, the writing that students do in response to literature shapes the quality of their response. Restricted writing (responding to short answer questions) has been found to be very unsuccessful as a way of eliciting sophisticated responses (Colvin Murphy, 1987; Marshall, 1987). Such questions tend to fragment the reading experience, rather than leading students to sophisticated or complex understandings of texts (Marshall, 1987).

Perhaps the most important issue, then, is not what types of questions teachers employ, or even what effect teacher questions have on student achievement, but whether questioning ought to be the predominant mode of literary instruction at all. In his recent study of classroom discussions about literature, Marshall (1989) found that teachers dominated most of the large group discussions, generating two to five times more talk per turn than did students. He concluded that:

> The students' role was to help develop an interpretation, rarely to construct or defend an interpretation of their own. While the goal expressed by teachers was to help students toward a point where they could individually develop a reasoned response to the text, we saw in the classrooms we observed few occasions where students could practice such interpretive skills--at least during large-group discussions. (p. 42)

Thus, despite the evidence for the superiority of student-generated responses, as opposed to teacher questions, it is clear that teacher questions are a predominant aspect of literature instruction and have a powerful influence on student responses. By and large, teachers who confine student responses to short answer questions about literary works, as opposed to more open-ended student-centered instructional methods, inevitably limit and restrict what their students learn about literature. We will begin in the following section by challenging *how* questions are used in the literature classroom, and then consider *whether* teachers' questions should be the primary mode of instruction.

Questioning as a Cognitive Process in the Literature Classroom

Let's begin by looking at what happens as the students and their teacher in the opening excerpt continue their discussion of "King Arthur":

Teacher: Okay. Number four is really a repeat of the characteristics of the romantic hero. He is graver, nobler, and more honorable than any ordinary human. Often the hero or heroine has the use of magic or other extraordinary powers. Can someone give me an example of what I mean by magic or extraordinary powers? Think about Arthur.

Student: Can talk to the animals.

Teacher: Right. He talks to the animals in the churchyard and is able to pull the sword from the stone and no one else can. Okay. The fifth characteristic that you need to have is what?

Student: They put on a disguise.

Teacher: Okay, often the romantic hero will put on a disguise to conceal his true identity. Anyone remember why Gareth does that? Wendy?

Student: To find out who his true friends are.

Teacher: Right, to find out who his real friends are. Okay. Good.

The teacher focuses on straightforward recollections of factual information from the textbook, rather than "higher level" thinking processes (i.e., "Anyone remember why Gareth does that?"). The majority of questions are procedural ("Does anyone have any questions about that?") or literal ("The fifth characteristic that you need to have is what?"). The teacher is focused on some very specific information, presumably to help her students understand the characteristics of a particular literary genre. None of her questions encourage the students to explore their own personal hunches, feelings, or evaluations. Overall, the questions are very closed-ended, eliciting, in each case, no more than one-sentence responses from the students. In fact, student comments constitute a very small proportion of the classroom "talk."

The problem of teacher questioning in the literature classroom, however, is not as simple as merely instructing teachers in using more higher level questions in their class discussions. There is a danger of oversimplification inherent in Gall's assumption that a larger proportion of

higher level cognitive questions in the literature classroom would be more effective.

From a reading as comprehension view, this teacher's questions are appropriate for determining whether the students have understood the characteristics of a particular literary genre. However, in terms of the multidimensional understandings necessary for the reading of literature, the content and conduct of the questions fall short. Readers are not encouraged to develop an understanding of how the text relates to them personally, the cultural and social dimensions of the text, its aesthetic dimensions, or even *why* romance novels were written as they were. Furthermore, we might wonder whether these readers, in talking *about* the text, were ever encouraged to *read* it as both artifact and meaning source.

Considering the diversity of possible responses to any literary text, it is problematic to speak in terms of higher or lower order responses, based only on thinking about literature. Recently, Dias (in press) has argued that cognitively oriented instructional materials may undercut the very meaning-making processes they seek to foster:

> Such procedures--previews, study-guides, and the like--interfere in vital ways with the processes of literary reading. While they direct reading to meet teacher-determined objectives and are often quite effective for dealing with unfamiliar text in the social studies or science, for instance, they are not necessarily compatible with, and quite likely subvert, the reader's own strategies for making sense of literary text. They are likely to cultivate a passive, receptive attitude to text at the expense of an active effort after meaning. (p. 6)

Thus, viewing teacher questioning in terms only of higher or lower level cognitive processes places the emphasis on cognition and ignores other essential elements of readers' responses, including affect, engagement, and empathy. Further, focusing on *text understanding* to the exclusion of other important sources of understanding limits the literary experiences of readers. Finally, teacher-controlled activities including study questions often engender passivity in student readers, rather than an active quest for deeper meaning.

As Judith Langer (1985) has also argued, global distinctions between literal and inferential questions in the reading process ignore the constructivist notion that meanings are arrived at gradually through a process of forming local and global envisionments. Thus, assessments of the effect of questions on reading comprehension formulated at only one point in the reading process fail to capture readers' developing responses over a period of time. Readers need, for example, to proceed through a series of local "envisionments" in order to arrive at more global interpretations.

In addition to ignoring the total range of readers' responses, viewing teacher questioning only in terms of its cognitive dimensions fragments the questioning process, isolating classroom questions from their linguistic and social context. Estimates and percentages of "higher level" questions paint a very incomplete picture of the role of questioning practices in the literature classroom. A teacher, for instance, may use literal level questions as a way of leading students to discover nuances of meaning and authorial intention.

The students in this 8th grade classroom, as an example, are disappointed because a poem they are reading does not rhyme. Through a series of literal, fact-oriented questions, the teacher brings them to an insight about the appropriateness of the author's technique:

Teacher: Okay. Compare (the lack of rhyme scheme) to the theme of the poem itself. What happens to the people in the poem?

Student: They get old.

Teacher: They get old, but what do they *think* is going to happen to them?

Student: Oh! They're gonna get money and be successful and that.

Teacher: I know. What happens?

Student: But they, but they...

Student: But they die!

Teacher: They either die or...

Student: They get old and can't do anything!

Teacher: So, to the people in the poem, they think they know what's gonna happen. They work all their lives, they save their money, they have paid vacations, they have good jobs, and then it doesn't happen to them. You think the poem is gonna rhyme, and it doesn't! You see the parallel?

Students: Oh!

While one may argue that this teacher was subtly leading students to her own "preferred response," it is important to note that she asked literal level questions, not to test students' recall of minute details, but to encourage them to explore why the writer did what he did. A straightforward categorization of her questions into higher and lower levels would fail to capture the underlying purposes behind her questioning technique.

Studies which isolate teacher questions from their social context and focus only on their cognitive dimensions ignore the aims and purposes of questioning within the overall goals of a particular literature lesson. There are occasions, for instance, where literal level questions are necessary to establish agreement on what basically happened in a complex literary work. There are other occasions when teacher responses which validate, paraphrase, or add to student responses are far more appropriate than "higher level" questions. Recently, Gall (1984) has argued that:

> Most research on teacher questions over the past two decades has investigated the effectiveness of recitations in which questions vary in cognitive level. A more basic issue, however, is whether recitations, irrespective of cognitive level, are effective. (p. 44)

A look at teacher questioning as a social interaction in the following section will allow us to consider the aims and purposes of classroom questioning, as well as the social roles and

academic norms implicit in the language of classroom questioning.

Questioning as Social Interaction

Chiquinia: Sometimes (teachers' questions) are boring and they make you answer. I guess that is how you learn things because you really don't want to hear it.

Sara: I think it might depend on the teacher who's asking the question, but mainly (teachers ask questions) so we don't just sit there and do nothing, and so we pay attention.

Leslie: I have never realiy studied literature but a lot of times when teachers ask questions it seems they really want you to write a lot--not just answer it but they always ask "why?" and that sorta bugs me. But I guess there is really nothing I can do because that's the way the teacher finds out if you know what you read.

As the responses of these three students demonstrate, teachers' questions do as much to reveal the ways in which students should *act* in the classroom, as they guide students toward an understanding of the text-at-hand. One subtle way in which teachers direct classroom interactions is in the language they use to reward or reshape student responses.

Information-Seeking Versus Known-Information Questioning

If we analyze the following excerpt from the "King Arthur" discussion, we see an example of what sociolinguists call an "Initiation-Reply-Evaluation" sequence (Mehan, 1979a,b; Shuy & Griffin, 1978).

(INITIATION)	Teacher:	Everybody look on p. 447. What is the code of chivalry? According to the code, what is the first thing a knight should do?
(REPLY)	Student:	Correct wrongs.
(EVALUATION)	Teacher:	Right, correct wrongs.
(INITIATION)	Teacher:	Can somebody give me an example?
(REPLY)	Student:	A damsel in distress is rescued.
(EVALUATION)	Teacher:	Right, a damsel in distress, and the knight takes off and rescues her from the big bad knight.

In this questioning episode, the teacher initiates the question, waits for a reply, and, by her positive response, signals an end to the conversational sequence. Further, the turn-taking pattern in this excerpt moves from teacher to student and back again. Never does the conversation move back and forth from student to student.

Not surprisingly, studies of the interactive nature of question and response patterns have revealed that questions asked in schools are distinctly different from the questions asked outside of schools (Mishler, 1975a, 1975b; Shuy & Griffin, 1978; Sinclair & Coulthand, 1975). Mehan (1979b) and others (Labov & Franshel, 1977) have distinguished between **information seeking** questioning sequences (i.e., "What time is it Denise? . . . Thank you, Denise") and **known information** questioning sequences (i.e., "What time is it, Denise? . . . Very good, Denise"; Mehan, 1979b, p. 285).

The King Arthur discussion is an excellent example of "known information" questioning. It is obvious that this teacher has a definite idea of the only acceptable answer. Her request for the "first thing" a knight should do is an additional sign to the students that acceptable answers also follow a predetermined order of some sort. Further, this teacher's positive and negative evaluations are powerful tools for setting the rules and limits of acceptable classroom discourse.

Often, when students fail to give the desired response to "known information questions," teachers will withhold positive evaluations and employ several conversational strategies, including prompting, repeating elicitations, and reducing the complexity of the question (Mehan, 1979b). In pursuing the preferred response, teachers of literature often give messages about what it takes to "succeed" in English. Notice, for example, the underlying messages this 8th-grade teacher sends to her students in the following discussion of Bill Cosby's book, Fatherhood:

Teacher: So basically if you had to say one thing about the book what would it be?

Student: Good! (laughter)

Teacher: Good! (laughter). What makes a book good, Brock?

Student: Like he's telling the truth, you know? It's like he talks about how his kids do stupid things like that, or how to discipline them, like he is not the boss of his own house...

Teacher: Oh, if you were to, uhm, watch a comedian like Bill Cosby--what is the difference between a good comedian and a poor comedian? Jeremy?

Student: I think the difference is facial expression. If you look like at Bill Cosby, his face is uhm, his face moves...

Teacher: That's true. Okay. Good point. Charlotte?

Student: There's this guy who like talks in a monotone, and everything he says is in this monotone...

Student: Yeah, I know him! (several voices)

Teacher: (over the voices) Okay. Let's get going. 'Cause there's something--these are all very good, and there's something that I'm looking for to make my point here . . . . Brock, do you know what I'm trying to get at?

Student: Yeah. I know what you're talking about 'cause Bill Cosby, right? He's tellin' the truth. He just makes it funny, that's all. 'Cause a lot of things that kids do, teenagers do, he just writes it and, I mean to an adult, this book is full of laughs, and kids, like "Man, I'll get you for this!"

Teacher: Adrienne? . . .

Student: Basically, what a comedian should do is turn something ordinary into something funny.

Teacher: Isn't she wonderful! She's *so* wonderful! But Brock started it. Hands down and listen to me for a second...

There are several interesting aspects of this conversation as a social interaction. In the beginning of the discussion, the teacher appears to be inviting a variety of student responses (i.e., "That's true. Okay. Good."). As the discussion proceeds, however, it becomes apparent that, rather than exploring a variety of interpretations, the students must seek the teacher's preferred response (i.e., "these are all very good, and there's something that I'm looking for to make my point"). Her question to Brock ("do you know what I'm trying to get at?") continues to establish that the floor is still open for the "right response."

The search continues as the teacher seems to ignore Brock's statement about the book's "truthfulness" and invites a response from another student ("Adrienne?"). It is immediately apparent that Adrienne has hit the interpretive "jackpot" ("Isn't she wonderful? She's so wonderful!"). Mehan (1979b) calls such conversational sequences "extended elicitations." By holding off on a positive evaluation and prompting students, the teacher in this excerpt extended the discussion until she received the "preferred response." Once she received Adrienne's reply, her positive evaluation ("Isn't she wonderful?") was followed quickly by a move to take control of the remaining discussion ("Hands down and listen to me for a second.").

Thus, positive and negative evaluations of readers' responses in literature discussions not only reinforce the notion of "correct" interpretation, they create a pervasive social climate with hidden rules and agendas for succeeding in English. According to Mehan (1979b), the evaluation act "seldom appears in everyday discourse" (p. 290), yet is a fundamental feature of classroom interaction. "It contributes information to students about the teacher's intentions, and contributes to the negotiation of a mutually acceptable reply" (p. 290).

While viewing teacher questioning as part of a social interaction recognizes students' and teachers' roles in a social process, such a view often assumes that merely changing the interactional "language of the classroom" will somehow change the classroom culture. Mehan, for instance, says:

> The interaction and accomplishment of social facts like answers to questions has implications for the way we view students' competence in educational environments . . . . Since each educational arrangement imposes constraints on learning, educators can examine the interactional demands of various educational and evaluative arrangements to determine if any particular arrangement is consistent with their educational goals and the child's previous experience. (1979b, p. 294)

While this is undoubtedly true, it is important to remember that classroom cultures emerge not only out of the instructional decisions of teachers and the responses of students, but out of the attitudinal frameworks of all participants. That is, behaviors of teachers and students subtly reveal their attitudes toward schooling, toward reading, toward interpretation, and toward each other. The underlying social roles and interpersonal dynamics of a particular classroom cannot be understood apart from an understanding of the attitudes and beliefs that shape and influence the classroom climate.

Thus, analyses of the **language** of classroom discourse give us valuable cues to social dimensions, as well as power relationships and academic equity issues in classrooms. However, without some attention to student and teacher **attitudes and goals**, such analyses give us only part of the picture. Recent approaches to literature teaching from an anthropological or socio-psycholinguistic framework have begun to investigate teacher questioning as it functions in and creates the total classroom community.

Questioning as Cultural Event

Amy: Mrs (x) asked stupid questions that you could look into the book and find. I like questions that you have to look into yourself to find, go beyond the words in the story.

Becky: I think (teachers' questions are) kind of boring for real. I wish there was a little more life in literature.

If we view teacher questioning as part of a cultural event, we see that as hidden agendas and curricular assumptions are subtly revealed in classroom discussions and assignments, students learn to fit their responses within the accepted conventions of a particular classroom interpretive community (Fish, 1976; Culler, 1975). In Mrs. X's classroom, success was measured by how adeptly students could answer study questions at the end of each selection. Students like Amy and Becky have learned to view reading in schools as reading devoid of personal relevance. In every classroom, readers like Amy and Becky must quickly develop the pragmatic skills to "read" and respond not only to the literary text before them, but to the hidden rules of "acceptable" interpretation in their particular classroom (Hynds, 1985, 1989, in press). As Bloome (1986) has argued:

> In schools, students learn to use reading and writing in ways consistent with the classroom community. In part, this may mean learning how to do worksheets, fill-in-the-blanks, and copy from books on the blackboard. In part, learning to use reading and writing in school may mean learning how to appropriately behave and respond to the teacher during literacy activities. (p. 74)

Given the pervasiveness of these accepted interpretive norms, the idea of the "unique" or "individual" response is problematic. As students listen and respond to each other in class discussions, their responses are ideally formulated through a collective process of "intersubjectivity" (Bleich, 1986). Sometimes, though, student responses are stifled rather than enriched through participation in class discussion. The ways in which students are reinforced for responding to teachers' questions and to each other constitute powerful messages about their status in the classroom community.

In the following sections, I will explore some fundamental issues that teachers might consider in understanding the classroom culture created by their questioning practices. In considering how teacher questioning can be used to facilitate rather than frustrate student response and interpretation, we might begin by considering the goals, purposes, and overall character of classroom interactions.

Questioning and Stances Toward Texts

Nat: I think [teachers] ask (*no offense, Mrs. [Y]*) *dumb questions*. I mean I really don't like English that much. And I find reading and then answering questions worthless! *But I love just plain old reading*. Especially the Vietnam War!

As Nat's response reveals, the way in which we pose questions in class discussion and in written activities greatly influences readers' stances and orientations toward literary texts. Louise Rosenblatt (1978) has distinguished between "efferent" reading (reading that is focused on what will happen after the literary experience, such as a test) and "aesthetic" reading (reading characterized by near total absorption in the momentary reading experience). Despite the fact that most of us have become lifetime readers on the basis of our ability to become totally immersed in the reading act, our students often become inordinately focused on the study or test questions immediately before or after the reading experience.

Hunt and Vipond (1985, 1986; Vipond and Hunt, 1984) have distinguished among three basic orientations in reading: story-driven, information-driven, and point-driven. Although the authors do not posit one reading stance as "superior" to another, they reflect that few readers approach literature from a "point-driven" orientation. Not surprisingly, readers' stances in school contexts are strongly influenced by the questions asked by teachers in examinations and study guides. As Vipond, Hunt, Jewett, and Reither (in press) observe:

> A reader's stance towards text depends in part on the task he or she expects to perform. For instance, a student who anticipates questions of the type, "What color was the heroine's coat?", is likely to read in an information-driven way. Questions about texts that imply there is one right answer or that require students to identify "the" theme, also invite information-driven reading--not to mention the more disturbing fact that they tend to alienate students from reading itself. . . . Simplistic, *ex cathedra* statements about "what the author meant" often function in classrooms to end discussion rather than to promote dialogue, and are therefore effectively information-driven. (p. 36)

Thus, teachers' questions not only affect students' literary responses and interpretation processes; they effect the stances students take toward texts and toward reading in general.

Recitation Versus Discussion

Tom: Most questions only describe the topsoil of stories, because most teachers it seems to me don't care about what students feel about stories, only about what they know.

Sadly, as Tom so eloquently argues, in many classrooms, literature is treated as a means to an end: discovering what students can memorize and repeat. In light of this disturbing fact, Dillon (1984) has argued that many classroom "discussions" are really thinly disguised "recitations." Discussion, according to Dillon, is characterized by student-student interaction, an emphasis on complex thinking processes, and higher levels of student talk (at least 40% of the total classroom discourse). Recitation, on the other hand, is characterized by teacher-student interaction, rote recall of factual information, and a low percentage of student talk. Citing Bridges (1979), Dillon proposes that "openness" is the fundamental characteristic of discussion. He sets forth the following prerequisites for distinguishing discussion from recitation. In discussion, he says:

> (a) the matter is open for discussion; (b) the discussants are open-minded; (c) the discussion is open to all arguments; (d) the discussion is open to any person; (e) the time limit is open; (f) the learning outcomes are open, not predictable; (g) the purposes and practices of the discussion are out in the open, not covert; and (h) the discussion is open-ended, not required to come to a *single* conclusion. (p. 52)

The "King Arthur" excerpt in the beginning of this paper is an illustration of **recitation**. There is no openness to multiple responses. Students are engaged in a single task: recalling specific facts about the characteristics of the romantic hero. Turn-taking proceeds from teacher to student, and back again, with only a very small proportion of the classroom talk emanating from the students. What little students *do* say is in direct response to the teacher's prompts and bears little evidence of thinking "beyond the information given."

By contrast, the following excerpt is an example of students and their teacher engaged in *discussion*. A high school class is exploring the theme of love in The Pigman by Paul Zindel:

Teacher: Somebody else over here said something about the love aspect of the story.

Student: Oh, love has many meanings in this book, 'cause uh, you know, uh, love expressed in many ways by John and Lorraine in the, uh love chapter, and the companionship, and the way Mr. Pignati and John and Lorraine got, get along together. And uh, they never hardly argue with each other. They're always trusting each other; they're always affectionate and caring.

Teacher: Uh huh.

Student: John and Lorraine showed they liked him 'cause when the store clerk asked Mr. Pigman where they were (garbled) she said they (garbled).

Student: They also told the hospital that they were his children.

Student: In a way, they was like they had a love for Mr. Pignati, too. Because when he died, they were very much upset. And he cared about them. You know, because, well, mainly it was because they became happy to talk to him or because it got them things. But still, I mean, they showed they cared about each other.

Teacher: Yes they did. They definitely showed that. Definitely true. All right. Yes?

Student: Uhm, and their parents, uh Lorraine's mother wasn't like too much, like she tried to protect Lorraine by telling her she was fat and everything, but you know, the reason [her mother] was telling [Lorraine] this was 'cause she wouldn't go out with men. Uh, I think Lorraine's mother was kinda lonely. She didn't want Lorraine to be off all the time, so she wouldn't go anywhere. She made her stay at home, and she didn't want her to do anything without Lorraine having to go behind her back. But she was protecting Lorraine, but she was really overprotecting her.

Teacher: Uh hum.

Student: And John's family, his father didn't act like he loved him, but he just, he didn't know much really to help John be a man, you know, uh . . . if he really loved John . . .

Teacher: You made a good point. If you really love somebody, you don't go to the extreme of overprotecting them nor do you appear to be uncaring. Alright. I've got a big question. How do you know when you are loved? April? . . .

Student: You support. . .

Student: Sometimes you don't. That's what causes problems...

Student: I think if you love somebody, you love everything about 'em. And uh, I mean, there were things they didn't like about, about that person, yet they just accepted them because they were part of them.

Teacher: You've used three important terms: "love," "like" and "accept." Is "like" and "love" always the same? Can you love someone without liking some of the things they do?

The preceding discussion is different in several ways from *recitation*. The floor is open for a variety of student opinions, the learning outcomes are not predictable, and the largest proportion of talk comes from students. Students' responses build on each other and are not constrained or overly directed by the teacher's evaluations. There is no single "preferred response" that the teacher appears to be moving toward.

Interestingly, only very few of this teacher's utterances are in the form of questions. She begins by turning the discussion over to the students with a statement ("Somebody over here said something about the love aspect of the story"). Her next few statements seem to function only to let students know that she has heard what they have to say ("Uh huh"). She continues to validate student responses ("They definitely showed that."), without leading the discussion in any predefined direction.

At two points she briefly interrupts a student in order to paraphrase an important point ("You made a good point. If you really love somebody, you don't go to the extreme of overprotecting them..." "You've used three important terms...").

The last three questions she asks are both global and personal. They deal with larger issues of literary meaning, yet relate to the students' own personal experience ("How do you know when you are loved?" "Are 'like' and 'love' always the same?" "Can you love someone without liking some of the things they do?").

Interestingly, then, the teacher in this classroom achieved a high degree of student interaction and involvement by asking relatively few questions. This suggests, as Dillon (1984) argues, that perhaps alternative responses to students are more effective in fostering discussion than a constant barrage of teacher-created questions. According to Dillon, "An invariant rule of thumb is to ask questions only when perplexed and genuinely needing to know. One or two perplexed questions in the midst of many alternatives is likely to have a positive effect on discussion" (p. 55).

As an alternative to teacher questions Dillon suggests: declarative statements (i.e., opinions), reflective restatements, descriptions of our state of mind, invitations to elaborate, encouragement of student questions, encouragement of students to ask questions of other students, and "deliberate, appreciative silence" (1984, p. 55). Such alternatives might do much to promote an inviting climate for reading, understanding, and responding to literature.

Challenging Questions or Challenging Questions?

Shayna: Well I don't really [know what to think about teachers' questions] because my last year teacher didn't ask questions, we just did questions in the book but if they did [ask questions] I might be interested.

Eric: I like [teachers' questions] because I learn from my answers.

Heidi: Some [questions] cause you to think. That's a pretty good challenge.

Recently, Bloome (1986) has argued that often "[f]rom the perspectives of at least some students, what reading and writing in the classroom are about is *getting through*" (p. 73). Regrettably, "in classrooms literacy may not necessarily be a tool for gaining knowledge or for communication but rather a series of events that must be endured" (p. 73).

As a way of "enduring" or "getting through" classroom literacy events, teachers and students often engage in what he calls "mock participation" or "procedural display." In mock participation, students go through the motions of engaging in classroom interactions (raising hands, looking attentive), but are totally unaware of what is actually taking place. In procedural display, students and their teachers are participating in the academic lesson without really engaging in any of the academic substance. In Bloome's words, procedural display "can be compared to a group of actors who know their lines, say them at the appropriate times, but who have little sense about what their lines or the play in general mean" (p. 73). In Bloome's view:

> If building literacy is to move beyond procedural display and mock participation, it must be viewed within the context of building or rebuilding the classroom community. Educators must consider the inherent and implied goals, social structures, and histories that move beyond procedural display. (p. 75)

If we look at the **cognitive** dimensions of teachers' questions, we can see the importance of moving beyond the literal and into more interpretive dimensions of literary response and understanding. Unfortunately, however, a heavy emphasis on reading as a cognitive skill has fragmented our notions of literary reading, just as the typical short answer questions about literature have fragmented our students' understandings of texts. When what students *know* becomes more important that what they think or feel, teachers' questions exist for the sole purpose of determining whether the students have actually read the text, and what they can recall from the experience. The result is that the aesthetic dimensions of literary reading are often lost entirely. Thus, passing the test and parsing the text can become more important than participating in an engaging encounter with literature.

It is important, then, to look at teachers' questioning practices as a **social interaction**. In becoming more aware of the proportion of student and teacher talk, of student responses directed to teacher rather than to each other, and of teacher evaluations that close off, rather than extend class discussions, teachers can enhance the quality and substance of classroom interactions. By understanding their choices of questions, and seeing how they reward or fail to reward particular student responses, teachers can loosen the reins of students' interpretation and response. Underneath and within the language patterns of classroom talk, then, lie many valuable insights about the social aspects of teachers' questioning.

Beyond these social dimensions, however, teachers must become aware of the ways in which their classroom conversations, study guides, and evaluation measures signal students to conform to preferred modes of behavior and response within the classroom interpretive community. Thus, learning to pose questions that challenge rather than constrain demands an understanding of not only the cognitive and social dimensions of literature teaching; it demands an understanding of the **cultural climate** that simultaneously emerges from and influences the language, thinking, teaching, and learning within the literature classroom.

As Shayna, Eric, and Heidi seem to argue, **challenging** questions are those that ask students to move beyond mock participation and procedural display, to a near-total immersion in the wonder and potential of literary interpretation and response. Posing questions that invite students to "learn from their answers," however, involves some element of risk. It means moving beyond study guides and comprehension quizzes, beyond the words in a story to the richness, possibility, and idiosyncrasy of each student's own experience.

Challenging questions are those that lead students to direct their responses to each other, rather than to the teacher alone--questions that encourage variety, diversity, and even idiosyncrasy, rather than conformity of response. Such questions allow literary themes and ideas to interact and coalesce, rather than to fragment and disintegrate; they nurture self-assured interpretation, rather than blind dependence on teachers or study guides.

But beyond learning to pose challenging questions lies an even bigger challenge: the creation of an environment where questions derive only from a genuine need to know. In such a classroom, students and teachers might begin to embrace, rather than to avoid the essential complexity and uncertainty that makes literary reading truly **literary**. Perhaps, rather than trying to ask better (i.e., "higher order") questions of their students, teachers might simply stop, listen, and learn. And in the "deliberate appreciative silence" that follows, compelling answers about understanding and learning in the literature classroom may emerge.

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